

Main Street Media of Tennessee

Publisher of the Wilson Post, Murfreesboro Post, Gallatin News, Hendersonville Standard, Robertson County Connection, Cheatham County Exchange, Portland Sun, Mature Lifestyles, specialty publications & websites
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POSTAL REGULATORY
COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

February 27, 2018

U.S. Postal Regulatory Commission
901 New York Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20268-0001

RE: 10-Year Rate System Review
Docket No. RM2017-3
Order No. 4258

Dear Commissioners,

As a representative of Main Street Media of Tennessee, a company publishing seven weekly newspaper in Middle Tennessee and whose livelihood depends on a sustainable mail industry, I am writing to express my strong opposition to the rate-making framework you have proposed as a result of your 10-year review of the CPI-based annual price cap established under the *Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act*. Last year, my company entered close to 1 million pieces of mail through various post offices.

By the Postal Regulatory Commission's (PRC) conservative estimates, which assume a 2% CPI, this proposal would raise First-Class single-piece, presort and Marketing Mail letters by more than 27% and Periodicals and Marketing Mail flats by more than 40% over five years. Your proposal has encouraged us to carefully look at our budgets and our mail volume and accelerate migration to digital channels and alternate delivery methods.

The PRC rate proposal would give the U.S. Postal Service use-it-or-lose-it authority, which it most certainly would use in full, to raise rates by at least 2% above the CPI for each market-dominant rate class for five years. Furthermore, the rate proposal allows an additional 1% for adhering to service standards and productivity targets. The proposed service standards and productivity target increases do not go far enough to encourage operational savings or achievement of service performance for the Postal Service. We believe postal increases should be based as an incentive by attaining service performance improvements defined and overseen by the PRC.

The PRC should understand the transformation we as mail owners and our mail supply partners have undergone and the way your pricing proposal will undermine the mail supply chain:

1. Rate increases by the Postal Service have been moderated by strategic investments made by the mailing industry to support increasingly complex mail preparation to qualify for the most preferred postage rates through incentive programs such as commingling, co-palletization, co-mailing, and palletization, to name a few. Most mail and print service providers and logistics and transportation companies have made prudent capital investments to reduce costs and improve workflow and throughput efficiencies. The PRC proposal destroys the ROI assumption on which mail supply chain partners have made capital investments.

2. Margins for companies across the mail supply chain are declining and they have limited ability to absorb postage increases. According to the *Idealliance 2017 State of the Industry Report*, less than one-third of mail and print service providers surveyed have been able to raise prices even modestly (below the rate of CPI) over the past year, limiting cost pass through and putting intense pressure on margins.
3. Through cost containment efforts mail and print service providers have helped to mitigate Postal Service rate increases experienced by mail owners. Mailpiece manufacturing has decreased while postal costs have increased to become now the largest portion of total expense of a mailpiece. In addition, today freight costs are projected to increase with major capacity issues, paper prices are anticipated to increase, and ink suppliers have announced increases. The PRC should be mindful of the "total combined cost" of a mailpiece. Continuing the ever increasing postal cost will harm the stability of the mail supply chain.

The PRC's proposal provides the Postal Service broad pricing flexibility at a time when already tight margins and pricing uncertainty could easily destabilize the mail supply chain and encourage users of the mail to seek alternative channels for distribution.

The proposal is not in the best interests of the Postal Service or the mail supply chain as a whole. By damaging the mail supply chain, it also threatens the Postal Service's source of revenue. Furthermore, the current CPI cap system incents the Postal Service to reduce costs and increase efficiency—the first objective of the rate cap established by Congress. Now, as economists expect inflation to start to increase, is not the time to reduce the incentives for the Postal Service to become leaner and more efficient.

Finally, these massive rate increases are completely unnecessary. Of the Postal Service's accumulated \$59.113 billion loss, \$54.8 billion was due solely to the requirement that it prefund its financially healthy retiree health plan. Congressional action to eliminate this harmful requirement is what is needed, not excessive rate increases that will cripple this industry.

For these reasons, I urge you to reconsider your decision to impose the proposed rate framework, and instead focus on rate increases specifically tied to cost efficiencies of the Postal Service. As a business, we have fundamentally reduced our costs and created quality products and services to meet new and evolving customer needs and current business dynamics. Your proposed rule puts the onus for cost reduction on our business, not on the Postal Service. We would suggest that your work should follow the Hippocratic Oath: "First, do no harm." Your proposal would do fundamental and long-lasting harm to the mail supply chain and the viability of mail as a central channel for communication and commerce.

Regards,

Sincerely,



Dave Gould
President, Main Street Media of Tennessee